

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

Claims 1-20 (canceled)

21. (currently amended) A hearing aid comprising:  
a deformable skin which bounds an internal region and wherein the skin does not exhibit sufficient rigidity to be insertable into a user's ear canal; and  
at least one spine which extends axially along an interior surface of the skin and is attached thereto sufficiently so as to provide insertion rigidity when the skin is inserted into the user's ear canal and which includes a deformable matrix in the region wherein the matrix applies expansive forces to the skin.

22. (original) A hearing aid as in claim 21 wherein the skin is formed of an elastomer selected from a class which includes silicone, polyurethane, latex, and polyvinyl-chloride.

23. (original) A hearing aid as in claim 21 which includes an output transducer wherein the skin and spine, but not the output transducer, are distorted on insertion into the ear canal.

24. (currently amended) ~~A hearing aid as in claim 21~~ A hearing aid comprising:  
a deformable skin which bounds an internal region wherein the skin does not exhibit sufficient rigidity to be insertable into a user's ear canal; and  
at least one spine which extends axially along an interior surface of the skin and is attached thereto sufficiently so as to provide insertion rigidity when the skin is inserted into

the user's ear canal and wherein the spine comprises a vent tube that is attached to the skin substantially along its length.

25. (canceled)

26. (currently amended) ~~A hearing aid as in claim 21~~ A hearing aid comprising:  
a deformable skin which bounds an internal region wherein the skin does not  
exhibit sufficient rigidity to be insertable into a user's ear canal; and  
at least one spine which extends axially along an interior surface of the skin and is  
attached thereto sufficiently so as to provide insertion rigidity when the skin is inserted into  
the user's ear canal and wherein the at least one spine is integrally molded with the skin.

27. (currently amended) A hearing aid as in claim ~~25~~ 21 wherein the matrix is compressible in response to forces applied by the ear canal whereby a volume parameter of the internal region is dynamically alterable in response to applied ear canal forces.

28. (original) A hearing aid as in claim 26 which includes a plurality of ribs formed on an exterior periphery of the skin.

29. (currently amended) ~~A hearing aid as in claim 21~~ A hearing aid comprising:  
a deformable skin which bounds an internal region wherein the skin does not  
exhibit sufficient rigidity to be insertable into a user's ear canal; and  
at least one spine which extends axially along an interior surface of the skin and is  
attached thereto sufficiently so as to provide insertion rigidity when the skin is inserted into  
the user's ear canal and which includes an audio output transducer in the internal region wherein the transducer is surrounded, at least in part, by a compressible matrix.

30. (original) A hearing aid as in claim 29 wherein the matrix pre-loads the skin with outwardly directed expansive forces.

31. (original) A hearing aid as in claim 29 wherein the matrix comprises at least one of an open cell foam, a closed cell foam, and a fabric.

32. (currently amended) A hearing aid as in claim ~~25~~ 21 wherein the expansive forces contribute to the skin forming a seal with the user's ear canal, wherein as the shape of the ear canal changes, due to movement of the user's jaw, the seal is broken, permitting air flow into the canal, and reforms as the matrix continues to apply expansive forces to the skin.

33. (original) A hearing aid as in claim 27 wherein the expansive forces contribute to the skin forming a seal with the user's ear canal, wherein as the shape of the ear canal changes, due to movement of the user's jaw, the seal is broken, permitting air flow into the canal, and reforms as the matrix continues to apply expansive forces to the skin.

34. (original) A hearing aid as in claim 27 which includes a faceplate attached to the skin.

Claims 35-103 (canceled)

104. (currently amended) A hearing aid comprising:  
a deformable skin which bounds an internal region and where the skin is compliant and  
at least one spine which extends axially along an interior surface of the skin and is attached thereto sufficiently so as to provide insertion rigidity when the skin is inserted into the user's ear canal and which includes a deformable matrix in the region wherein the matrix applies expansive forces to the skin.

105. (previously presented) A hearing aid as in claim 104 wherein the skin is formed of an elastomer selected from a class which includes silicone, polyurethane, latex, and polyvinyl- chloride.

106. (previously presented) A hearing aid as in claim 104 which includes an output transducer wherein the skin and spine, but not the output transducer, are distorted on insertion into the ear canal.

107. (currently amended) ~~A hearing aid as in claim 104~~ A hearing aid comprising:  
a deformable skin which bounds an internal region where the skin is compliant  
and  
at least one spine which extends axially along an interior surface of the skin and is  
attached thereto sufficiently so as to provide insertion rigidity when the skin is inserted into  
the user's ear canal and wherein the spine comprises a vent tube that is attached to the skin substantially along its length.

108. (canceled)

109. (currently amended) ~~A hearing aid as in claim 104~~ A hearing aid comprising:  
a deformable skin which bounds an internal region where the skin is compliant  
and  
at least one spine which extends axially along an interior surface of the skin and is  
attached thereto sufficiently so as to provide insertion rigidity when the skin is inserted into  
the user's ear canal and wherein the at least one spine is integrally molded with the skin.

110. (currently amended) A hearing aid as in claim ~~108~~ 104 wherein the matrix is compressible in response to forces applied by the ear canal whereby a volume parameter of the internal region is dynamically alterable in response to applied ear canal forces.

111. (previously presented) A hearing aid as in claim 109 which includes a plurality of ribs formed on an exterior periphery of the skin.

112. (currently amended) ~~A hearing aid as in claim 104~~ A hearing aid comprising:  
a deformable skin which bounds an internal region where the skin is compliant  
and

at least one spine which extends axially along an interior surface of the skin and is attached thereto sufficiently so as to provide insertion rigidity when the skin is inserted into the user's ear canal and which includes an audio output transducer in the internal region wherein the transducer is surrounded, at least in part, by a compressible matrix.

113. (previously presented) A hearing aid as in claim 112 wherein the matrix pre-loads the skin with outwardly directed expansive forces.

114. (previously presented) A hearing aid as in claim 112 wherein the matrix comprises at least one of an open cell foam, a closed cell foam, and a fabric.

115. (currently amended) A hearing aid as in claim ~~108~~ 104 wherein the expansive forces contribute to the skin forming a seal with the user's ear canal, wherein as the shape of the ear canal changes, due to movement of the user's jaw, the seal is broken, permitting air flow into the canal, and reforms as the matrix continues to apply expansive forces to the skin.

116. (previously presented) A hearing aid as in claim 110 wherein the expansive forces contribute to the skin forming a seal with the user's ear canal, wherein as the shape of

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the ear canal changes, due to movement of the user's jaw, the seal is broken, permitting air flow into the canal, and reforms as the matrix continues to apply expansive forces to the skin.

117. (previously presented) A hearing aid as in claim 110 which includes a faceplate attached to the skin.

118-141 (canceled)